Division of Chicago Psychotronic Film Society

It's Only a Movie



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SUBSCRIPTIONS: $12.00 for 12 issues
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BLECHBUSTERS

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In my initial column, I promised that all of the movies reviewed here will be viewed under actual multiplex conditions. Well, screw that - due to my position as film critic to the **Internet Daily News** (http://tvp.com/idn/movie/entcin.html), I've begun to receive invites to advance press screenings. These usually take place in small, comfy, state-o-the-art screening rooms, where if somebody's kicking the back of your seat, it's not some bratty little kid with wet pants - it's Gene Siskel. Sure, it's free - but there's only one show, and there's no snack bar. Yes, we pro critic really do suffer for You the Reader. This means my reviews for **IDN** and **IOAM!** Will appear sooner, maybe even before the film is released. I'll still only cover multiplex fodder here, but sometimes I'll have to guess (I was going to leave out *French Twist*, but then I saw a poster for it in the lobby of the Lincoln Village 1-9). Also, since I'm not on all the lists yet, I'll still be buying tickets to catch up.

The only big star double-dipping this month in an attempt to have the column dedicated to them is Christian Slater, but I've stayed away from *Bed of Roses*, fearing an allergic reaction. However, this month one of those sadly ignored screenwriters has a hot type-writer. And so, this month's **Blechbusters** is dedicated to Scott Rosenberg, the plucky wordsmith who scribbled our first two features.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS

Enjoyable sitcom stuff, with an ensemble cast so big, I'm not gonna mention any of them. For those of you who don't know what "ensemble" means: that's when everybody's credited in alphabetical order, whether you've heard of them or not. A bunch of twentysomething guys in a small town are confused as hell as to what to do about the women in their lives - much like the cult fave *Diner*, but without the nostalgia angle. Plus, cool tunes throughout. Despite it's status as a 'date movie', some chicks don't get it. Ladies, as obnoxious as it may seem, this is how most of us Martians really really feel. Please don't destroy us because you don't understand us.

THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

Good-hearted ex-wiseguy Andy Garcia (who's starting to get less repulsive with age) is forced into One Last Job by sicko mob boss Christopher Walken. Garcia's team of misfits botch things horribly, so they're all sentenced to "buckwheats" - to get killed in a very painful manner. The cast is a delightful bunch of familiar character actors, and there's lots of fun to

be had during the campy parts, but the flick bogs down when things get serious, mainly due to the fact that Garcia (though talented) doesn't hold things together, and the attempted romance falls flat. Highlight: Steve Buscemi as Mr. Shhsh, a Ninja hitman that looks like Don Knotts, and his death duel with Treat Williams' raving psycho Critical Bill.

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN

Speaking of uneven weirdness. Blood brothers Quentin Tarantino (as actor/writer) and Robert Rodriguez have taken an old crime pulp and stapled it to an old horror pulp for this truly twisted treat. Quentin and TV's George Clooney are the crooked Gecko brothers, who kidnap preacher Harvey Keitel and his kids to help them lam across the Mex border. They wind up at the Titty Twister roadhouse, which is in reality - surprise! - a temple of demonic vampires. It's almost too bad that the ads give away the plot - it would be really wild to see this and *not* know there are vampires in it. The last ½ hour is a relentless gorefest the likes of which are infrequently seen in modern films, which makes this a rather special treat - but not for the faint of stomach. Keep your eyes peeled for special psychotronic guest stars. The left-turn into left field plot makes this kind of a spiritual cousin to *Rat Pfink A Boo Boo*. I wonder who thought of the amazing final shot (it's not in the script), which is not only visually stunning, but a very clever gag which ties a lot together.

WHITE SQUALL

A bunch of white guys squalling on a boat. It's supposedly based on a true story about a school ship that sunk in 1961, but 95% of it's a bunch of overwrought crap by Hollywood hacks. Bears similarities to a lot of teen comedies, but played for tears. Director Ridley Scott gives us a terrific shipwreck sequence, but should've given the script the old heave-ho.

SCREAMERS

Peter Weller and a group of last survivors try to get off a planet overrun by killer robots called Mobile Armored Swords. This Canadian-made sci-fi, despite its attempts to rip off *Aliens* and *Terminator* at every opportunity, actually has a well conceived framework, and is impressive technically. *Scanners* series vet Christian Duguay is good at providing fresh ways of shooting old scenes, but most of it is depressing rather than exciting.

FRENCH TWIST

Alain Chabat stars as a French real estate agent who constantly (surprise!) cheats on his wife, even though he's married to Victoria "Tie Me Up" Abril. When he finds out that she's having an affair with the stocky lesbian (played by director Josiane Balasko) whose van broke down by their house, he freaks out. She begs forgiveness, but when she finds out about *his* affairs, *she* freaks out. They settle into a constantly twisting *menage au tension*.

Hilarious screwball comedy set in the gorgeous French countryside. Subtitled, so learn to read before you see it.

BROKEN ARROW

For his second US feature, HK director John Woo is given a much bigger box of toys to play with, so he should be forgiven if he gets carried away a little. The casting of unlikely action stars Christian Slater and Samantha Mathis, (remember *Pump Up the Volume*?) as a stealth bomber pilot and the park ranger he meets when John Travolta steals their payload of nukes and leaves him for dead, is the only down-to-earth element of this wildly over-the-top action extravaganza. Since the plot is so farfetched to begin with, Woo and writer Graham Yost (*Speed*) feel free to play it on the edge of farce, with Travolta's psycho doing everything but wink at the camera (and actually tosses off a SubGenius line). Woo blows up a train, an elevator, a truck, a stealth bomber, a mine shaft, and several helicopters in the course of this parade of creative combat choreography which tastefully downplays his penchant for overwrought sentimentality. Hopefully, this will be a big enough hit for Woo to make movies his way from now on.

RUMBLE IN THE BRONX

Jackie Chan tries to conquer America again, but this time with a movie made the HK way. Here he plays a kung fu champ visiting his uncle in New York (as played by Vancouver - watch for the mountains in the background), who runs into trouble with a street gang, and then bigger trouble with much bigger criminals while helping out at the family's market. New Line Cinema cut 15 minutes of "cultural differences", but some of this still plays awkwardly, as when Jackie gets blatantly preachy. The editing also serves to de-emphasize the romantic triangle previously left hanging at the end, but at the expense of Anita Mui's footage. Despite the fact that this has better Anglo actors than most Asian films, some of them are still painfully bad. But the cutting has left us with what really matters - Jackie in action, and the guy literally gives 'til it hurts. Chan's movies are really in a class by themselves - even his lesser efforts (like this one) have 10 times the thrills of most other action films, especially if you keep in mind it's mostly done without special effects. He deserves as much success as he can get. The soundtrack has also been redone and tweaked, with a catchy new tune by the Ramonesque Ash over the closing credit outtakes.

That's all for this time. Maybe next month I *won't* have a vampire movie to review for a change.

IT'S ONLY A RUMOR

Ringo Lam, the director of *City on Fire,* the Hong Kong action film that *Reservoir Dogs* borrowed from is directing **Jean-Claude Van Damme** in the film *Bloodstone!* Filming takes place in Canada and France...Ever wonder where the title *Reservoir Dogs* is from? See the **Brian dePalma** film *Blow Out* for the answer!...There will be another Brady Bunch movie...*Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life* is an upcoming documentary on the author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountain-head*...**Robin Williams** and **Kenneth Branagh** will star in *Hamlet.* Why, God, why...*The Avengers* movie is shooting in England!...**Ken** *"The Devils"* **Russell** is shooting *Skeletons* in America...*Star Trek: Resurrection* is the new motion picture with the Next Generation cast-let's hope this time they have a script!...**Brian Wilson** recorded with the **Beach Boys** over Christmas in Chicago...If you've been avoiding *3rd Rock From the Sun* because you were afraid it was a Mork & Mindy retread-give it a try. Tuesday nights at 7:30pm. I haven't laughed so loud since the Hymie the Robot episodes of *Get Smart!*...The book, *Films of Vincent Price* by Lucy Chase Williams and published by Citadel Press is a must get for fans of the elegant ones' classic Psychotronic films...Pick up the new *Cult Magazine* with part one of an interview with **Joe Dellasrandro,** the star of the Andy Warhol and Paul Morrisey films. It's written by our own **Michael Ferguson**...The ham radio days of the Internet are numbered. Right now no one has discovered who to market to, how to market, who wanders through it, and how to make them pay to enter. So many corporations have set up web sites, it's a miracle they haven't figured out that using the Internet as a dumping ground for press releases is hardly the best way to approach it. The day will come...Japan's copyright laws work for twenty-five years—and then all material goes into the public domain. The music industry is pissed here in the U.S. that groups signed in the 60's can be released by anyone in Japan—but the same record companies and lawyers that sold the rights in Japan knew the law and the years involved. I just think the record companies didn't think rock would last or, specifically, some rock bands would be big for years. So they went for the quick money. Was that Japan's fault? I think not...**Dario Argento's** *The Stendahl Syndrome* has pulled in 1 1/2 million dollars in Italy playing in 69 theatres in 2 weeks. The film actually did better the second week than the first—best of luck Dario!...The first Academy Award winning best film, ***Wings,*** from 1927 is one of the most thrilling action films ever made. It would easily make my top 5 best war movies' list. The film stars Gary Cooper and Clara Bow, and the recreations of the air war in France circa World War I are still breathtaking and stunning. The film will be shown on the big screen with an organ accompaniment at one of Chicago's last movie palaces: **The Gateway Theatre** (5216 W. Lawrence, 777-9438) on Friday March 22 at 8:00 p.m. Call for ticket info. See you there! **MGM** is working on a film in Beijing with **Ronny Yu** called *Warriors of Virtue*. **Michelle Khan** is looking for a project stateside. The CD-ROM of *Congo* may end up being more successful than the movie...

Cheers
Michael Flores

THE PERFECT MARTINI

Shhh...

This recipe is stolen from a group of martini lovers by the popular culture terrorist group ***The Wrecking Crew.*** I have tried it and it really is the best! Even if it does take 48 hours to drink! Good to have on hand at any party. Although I personally cannot condone the tactics and philosophy of ***The Wrecking Crew*** and offshoots such as ***The Doom Squad.*** , I do enjoy a great martini.

1 bottle gin

1 magic marker

1 dry vermouth

olives/hot brussel sprouts/etc.

Mark the liquid level of the gin with the marker.

Put in the freezer.

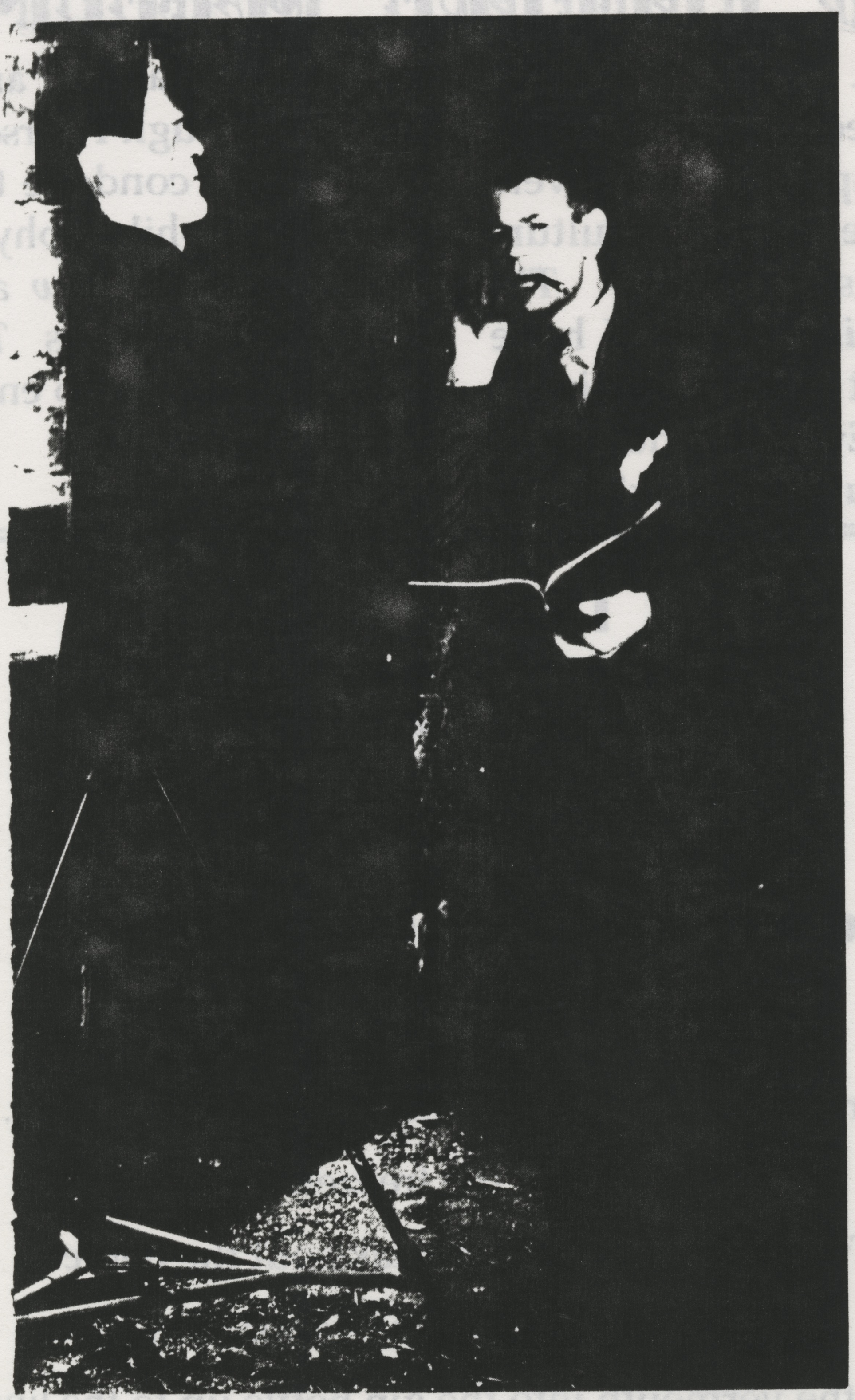
Twenty-four hours later take out the bottle.

There will have been evaporation.

Pour the vermouth into the gin bottle up to the line.

Put the gin back in the freezer for another 24 hours.

Take it out and pour!



James Whale clowns for the publicity photographer on the set of *Frankenstein*.

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BACK ISSUES

Sorry—there aren't any! When we receive a request for an issue, we usually send the latest issue, but often reviews in other zines appear months after we publish and are no longer available. If you would like to drop us a car d and an offer for a specific back issue, perhaps our members or subscribers will sell you their copy. We'll print the requests.



JAMES WHALE

by
Michael Ferguson

James Whale was gay. There, I've said it. Thirty-nine years after his peculiar death, the truth can be told.

Then again, I'm only 55 years late with the news, because everyone knew James Whale was gay in 1931, too, so put out your torches. In one of the most refreshingly strange instances of classic Hollywood lore, we have a celebrated director who did not live a double life. Whale was attracted to men--usually much younger than he--and quite simply remained true to himself throughout his remarkable stint in Tinsel Town. This is not to suggest that Whale was either affronterous, flaming or at all considered himself a pioneer or activist; he just lived his life, found a young man with whom he fell in love and they purchased a house together in the Pacific Palisades while he was being pushed by Universal Studios to do a script titled THE RETURN OF FRANKENSTEIN.

James Whale was British-born into a devoutly religious family. His father was a blast furnaceman, who made little to elevate his family out of poverty in the Worcestershire countryside. Jimmy was an "artistic" boy from the get-go, a thin, good-looking lad whose body wasn't made for hard labor. He found drawing delighted him and he was quite good at it. Being the sixth of seven children, he couldn't count on his father's wages to provide a proper education, so he reluctantly worked in a cobbler's shop into his mid-twenties while contriving a way out of this bleak world.

World War I was the unlikely ticket. He joined the fray and was a second lieutenant in France when he was captured in Belgium and spent 15 months in a prison camp. Forcibly idle again, this time he turned to his fellow soldiers and organized POW theatrical productions. After his release, he sold war sketches to the press and soon landed a job as a newspaper cartoonist. Out and about and amongst those who traveled in wider, more artistic circles, Jimmy immersed himself in theater by stage managing, designing sets, and even acting the occasional role.

His stage debut came in 1919 in THE KNIGHTS OF THE BURNING PESTLE, followed by an appearance in a production of THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, which co-starred a strange-looking bird named Ernest Thesiger, with whom he became very good friends. Thesiger was an overt homosexual, a dandified priss with a wicked and witty tongue and Whale enjoyed his company, even if he didn't share his manner.

The theater world enveloped young Mr. Whale and he found himself meeting, acting with, or carousing with the likes of Elsa Lanchester, H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh and John Gielgud. Having joined the Oxford Players, he came very close to even taking a wife, the exotic designer Doris Zinkeisen, but their close friendship never took precedence over his attraction to men.

With art imitating life, Whale was cast (and did set design) in the 1924 production of J.R. Ackerley's PRISONERS OF WAR, a drama detailing an officer's love for a young soldier in a Swiss prison camp. Next came the surprisingly nasty PORTRAIT OF A MAN WITH RED HAIR (1928), with a young Charles Laughton as the title gargoyle who sadistically imprisons two lovers in his clifftop house in order to mentally toy with and torture them. Whale was cast as Laughton's son (even though he was a decade older than Laughton) and thus began the two men's strained professional relationship. Charles, a self-hating homosexual, found that Whale's ease about his own sexuality was somehow off-putting, maybe even threatening. He would often refer to Whale, who was now hiding his humble background in the airs of new-found sophistication, as the "would-be gentleman."

With a couple of low-budget Grand Guignol plays under his belt, directing jobs came his way, too. A man who voraciously ate up all the experiences of his given trade, by acting and designing, seemed a natural choice for taking the reins. His first two shows were moderate successes, but his third would catapult him to fame and glory.

He got the job because no one else wanted it. War plays weren't money makers. So when along came a drama steeped in stark realism about hero worship in the trenches, Whale stepped in and mounted JOURNEY'S END. His cast included George Zucco, Maurice Evans and a 21-year old Laurence Olivier in the lead. Olivier, who years later would claim the role of Stanhope as one of the best he'd ever had, complained to Whale at the time that "there's nothing in it but meals."

Whale's powerful staging (no doubt drawing upon his own war experience) and minutely-detailed set design gelled with a stellar cast and the raw material to create a sensation...among the critics. Upon its October, 1928 premiere, the audience received it so ambivalently that when the papers came the next morning it sent cast and crew into shock. "The Greatest of All War Plays!" declared the headlines. Hard-nosed

critic James Agate's radio review that night was a raving slobber of praise.

Before it caught fire with audiences, though, Olivier was whisked away to do BEAU GESTE, and the production lost its theater. A wealthy patron-of-the-arts who fancied artistic underdogs coughed up the cash to find it a new home and into the role of Stanhope came a 28-year old named Colin Clive. Clive proved so bad in rehearsals, so completely unnerved and jittery, that Whale knew he had his man despite complaints from other members of the cast. The playwright, R.C. Sheriff, even encouraged the shaking actor to take a shot of whiskey before beginning a rehearsal and this seemed to allow Clive to work, to calm him down a bit, even though it's easy to see in hindsight how tragic a call that was for an actor whose premature death was accelerated by his chronic alcoholism.

Clive's edgy, eminently watchable manner brought the piece to even greater heights as the play moved to an even larger theater and played before standing-room only crowds. Whale was asked to come to America to direct the show on Broadway, which he did with resultingly far less success than in Britain, but by 1929 there were 14 companies doing JOURNEY'S END in English and another 17 in translation worldwide. That kind of success can only lead a young director to one place: Hollywood.

Contracted at $500 a week to work as a dialogue coach on a picture called THE LOVE DOCTORS (1929), Whale was wined and dined by several studios. It was, however, when a Paramount assistant story editor named David Lewis took him to lunch that Whale, in turn, took him to heart. There was 14 years between them, but the bond was almost immediate and James Whale now had even more reason to find success in America.

His wretched experience as dialogue coach on Howard Hughes' HELL'S ANGELS (1930), which was re-written and re-shot at enormous cost to adapt to the new age of movie sound, did prove an excellent training ground for Whale, who knew virtually nothing about filmmaking. He would take every bit of information he could, for he was now preparing to bring JOURNEY'S END to the big screen.

JOURNEY'S END (1930) starred Colin Clive (nabbed from the stage show, thereby effecting the box-office receipts) and David Manners and represents an inaugural glimpse at the distinctive style he would bring to all of his films, including his penchant for introducing characters in darkness and having them emerge into light, his roving camera (all the more noticeable here because much of the film is static), and his love of close-ups.

The success of the stageplay of JOURNEY'S END had lead to Universal's decision to do the film version of ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT (1930), so it was that Carl Laemmle wanted James Whale at his studio and got him. First up was WATERLOO BRIDGE (1930), a successful wartime tale of a soldier and a prostitute that ends tragically for both. Bette Davis had a small role and her later assessment of the director would be echoed by many who worked with him: aloof, self-serious, demanding and therefore somewhat unlikable. Still, with WATERLOO BRIDGE, his craft was growing by leaps and bounds with imaginative camera use, tracking shots, overheads, and inventive use of off-screen sound effects for atmosphere.

His next project was a gift to the promising filmmaker, yanked as it was from Robert Florey and Bela Lugosi on a contractual technicality and after a disastrous 20 minute screen test. FRANKENSTEIN, detailed later, was cast with Colin Clive in the lead at Whale's insistence. "I chose Colin Clive because he had exactly the right kind of tenacity to go through with anything," Whale told the *New York Times*, "together with the kind of romantic quality which makes strong men leave civilization to shoot big game." His lover, David Lewis, reportedly suggested that Whale check out an actor named Boris Karloff, who he'd seen in THE CRIMINAL CODE, for the role of the Monster. The rest is history.

In fact, the rest of Whale's genre outings are all history and that's why I'd like to turn to his other lesser known works. THE KISS BEFORE THE MIRROR (1933) is the tale of attorney Paul Lukas, called in to defend a friend who has murdered his adulterous wife, who then begins to see similar clues of infidelity in his own marriage. ONE MORE RIVER (1934) stars Colin Clive as a domineering man bent on destroying his estranged wife through the divorce courts. The courtroom scenes are memorably filmed using a roving camera that visually brings to life the static setting and sets a precedent for courtroom dramas to come. REMEMBER LAST NIGHT? (1935) is an alternately loved and vilified attempt at screwball comedy with Edward Arnold trying to sort out a series of murders from a cast of characters so drunk or suffering from hang-overs that no one seems to remember or care about anything. If a Whale film deserves to be re-discovered, it is probably this one. Whale also brought to the screen SHOW BOAT (1936), starring Irene Dunne, Allan Jones and the classic rendition of "Ol' Man

River" by Paul Robeson.

The Laemmles eventually lost Universal, momentarily leaving the director without a home, and then David Lewis began his role as assistant producer under Irving Thalberg at MGM, where Whale was to direct Charles Laughton in that studio's GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS. The "new" Universal nabbed him back before that would happen however.

The sequel to ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, entitled THE ROAD BACK (1937), was a controversial production and Whale was directing at what the studio considered a mercilessly slow pace. On top of studio intrusions, the Nazi's were unhappy with the production and the German consul in L.A. sent "threatening" letters to the actors, saying that if they continued to make this film, all of their past and future films would be unwelcome in Germany. The actors protested and asked the U.S. government to intercede. The consul backed off, but as far as the studio was concerned, Whale was skating on thin ice. He refused to cut several sequences and so they took it from him and hacked it to ribbons, removing a scene showing a grotesque dwarf teaching boys how to goose-step in preparation for a future war.

After Thalberg died, David Lewis went to Warner Bros. and no longer had the power of influence he once had. Whale did THE GREAT GARRICK (1938) at Warner's, an enjoyable comedic look at the egocentric actor David Garrick. But that same year, close friend Colin Clive succumbed to pulmonary tuberculosis after his dramatic plunge into alcoholism and Whale was stuck making "B" films. He wasn't even consulted when the horror revival hit and SON OF FRANKENSTEIN was put into production.

He began shooting the 1939 version of THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK (which includes a young Peter Cushing in a small role), but was unhappy and lagging behind schedule. With 9 days left to shoot, he was fired, though his name remains on the picture. His relationship with Lewis had begun to distance, yet Lewis drummed up GREEN HELL (1940) to keep the somber director busy. "About five of the worst pictures ever made are all in that one picture," said co-star Vincent Price of this silly jungle flick.

Fired from yet another film (Columbia's THEY DARE NOT LOVE -1941), Whale was becoming quickly dispirited. David Lewis had enlisted in the military, at age 40, and Whale was left alone. At a complete loss as to what had happened, as to why his career was crumbling, Whale took solace in painting. Fortunately, he had invested his money wisely--figuring early on that all this wouldn't last and remembering from where

he [illegible]d in comfort, directing the occasional play, staging shows for the enlisted men, and even directing a never-aired television film entitled HELLO OUT THERE (1949).

At age 61, Whale went to Europe and met 25-year old Pierre Foegel, with whom he fell in love and brought back as his chauffeur. Rejuvenated, he directed PAGAN IN THE PARLOUR, a British stage play that opened big and died quick.

Back at home, having suffered theatrical failure after failure, he re-invested in his social life, put in a pool (though he couldn't swim) and began to hold legendary gay parties. While David Lewis was back and assistant producing RAINTREE COUNTY, Whale suffered a nervous breakdown, was hospitalized and received shock treatments.

On Memorial Day, 1957, he wrote a lengthy note in which he asked "Do not grieve for me--my nerves are all shot...the future is just old age and pain." After a few drinks, he walked out to the pool and in a moment as bizarre to contemplate as any moment he'd ever committed to celluloid, he jumped head first into the shallow end, effectively knocking himself unconscious and subsequently drowning.

Did James Whale, as has so often been suggested, really kill himself because he had been blackballed by a homophobic Hollywood? That would be the easy answer, though probably insupportable without a more detailed look into his studio dealings. Certainly there was a time, when he had attained success and was Universal's star director, that his open lifestyle was overlooked in the face of box-office revenues, but I suspect his homosexuality was only one factor of many in the rise and fall of the golden age of horror's finest maestro.

In the end, he even directed his own suicide with a morbid, Whale-sian touch; on the night stand, he left a book: *Don't Go Near the Water.*

FRANKENSTEIN (1931) - Whale screened THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, THE GOLEM, METROPOLIS and THE MAGICIAN before beginning to shoot this classic horror film. At 70 minutes, it is an economically-designed screenplay that codifies just what it is to be a monster movie, as the film exists for no other reason than to thrill us in three acts: Creation, abandonment, and search and destroy. Yet in its simplicity, it speaks loudly to its issues of rejection, of parenthood and irresponsibility, of the evils of having a child out of wedlock. Pictorially and compositionally splendid in every way, it paints Frankenstein as a mad scientist from the very beginning and a youthful, smooth-faced and even somewhat

hard to imagine why, yet the studio heads wanted Leslie Howard and Whale himself tested Bette Davis for Henry's wife. Whale's creation scene is fast, to the point and even matter-of-fact, though tellingly punctuated after the 8 recitations of "It's alive" with a censor-imposed thunderclap erasing the finish of Clive's line: "In the name of God, now I know what it feels like to *be* God!" For all this, Henry is an incredibly amateurish scientist. Having created this Monster (so beautifully played by Karloff), he allows it to be tortured by Fritz, deprives it of light, allows it to walk around unattended, and then chains it in the dungeon. The film is slightly more sober than Whale's subsequent genre work, but it still holds up well, and there's room for the occasional visual or verbal joke: for example, after the "creation" sequence, the next time we see Clive he's smoking a cigar. Was it good for you?

THE OLD DARK HOUSE (1932) - A longtime obscurity, this genre classic is now available in reasonably good prints. Whale assembled a superb cast, including Raymond Massey, Melvyn Douglas, Gloria Stuart, Charles Laughton, Ernest Thesiger and Boris Karloff. Karloff, fresh from his FRANKENSTEIN success (as an opening title reminds us), is mostly wasted in the lowbrow mute brute role, perhaps in itself a dirty joke of Whale's, who was said to be a little taken aback at all the press Karloff got over FRANKENSTEIN. Ostensibly a black comedy, which 1930's audiences weren't prepared to accept, this J.B. Priestley adaptation has several couples stranded for a wild and rainy night at the cavernous mansion of the bizarre family of Femm, represented with sardonic wit and skeletal frailty by Ernest Thesiger and his curmudgeonly, hard-of-hearing sister, played by Eva Moore (Olivier's mother-in-law at the time). The script is loaded with witty barbs and dark slices of anti-religious and anti-social banter and not very much happens in it except for conversation (the original story was meant as social criticism, not mystery) until the family's most fearsome sibling is set loose within the house. There are quintessential Whale moments throughout, including the entire dinner sequence ("Have a poe-tay-toe"), a game of shadowplay, and a remarkably succinct outburst from Laughton during which his pompous Mr. Porterhouse emotionally strips himself with the moving tale of why he lost his wife to suicide.

THE INVISIBLE MAN (1933) - With stunning special effects by John P. Fulton, here we have Whale's most unusually unfunny horror film. That isn't to say there by KC Shelby) hasn't been infused with them. Una O'Connor's inspired casting as the innkeeper's hysterical wife begins the film in true Whale spirit. Her nosiness combines with her sense of duty (to bring the bandaged stranger a jar of mustard) and it results in the revelation of Whale's trademark genius. For a split second, the intrusive Ms. O'Connor registers that the lower 1/4 of her guest's face isn't there and then we get to look at the amazing sight in profile, without fanfare, without prolonged leer. In a film as laden and dependent on special effects as this one, Whale's matter-of-fact approach to the fantastic elevates it to haunting heights. Furthermore, the standard "he meddled in things men should leave alone" passage comes in the first 10 minutes, not as the film's moral epitaph. "E's invisible, that's what's the matter with 'im." Jack Griffin also lays out his whole plan right there in the beginning: he'll rape, he'll kill, he'll rule the world and "You've brought it on yourselves!" Of course, one can't help wondering why William Harrigan doesn't just sock Griffin in the head or whack him with a baseball bat while he's wearing his duds. There's also no excuse for the infamous oversight at the film's climax where Griffin is given away by shoe-prints (and not footprints) in the fresh snow. Curiously, this made Claude Rains a star.

THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935) - In FRANKENSTEIN, it was the shot of the hunchbacked Fritz stopping to pull up his sock. In THE OLD DARK HOUSE, it was the shot in the mirror when puritanical Eva Moore stops to straighten her hair after berating Gloria Stuart's fleshy breasts and vanity. These are trademarks of James Whale's genius: the use of an unconventional convention that makes the weird seem weirder in its normalcy. In BRIDE, it occurs when an old gypsy woman insists on the whereabouts of the "pepper and salt" while the family nervously discusses the Monster-on-the-loose. Though eventually chopped of 15 minutes (at the director's approval), BRIDE is Whale's masterwork, a cruelly whimsical black comedy set to a lush Franz Waxman score that reaches its zenith with a splash of clanging wedding bells heralding the Bride. Lapses in logic and continuity included, nearly everything about this film lends itself to canonization, be it Thesiger's devilishly decadent Pretorius and his coffin-top midnight snack, the cavernous sets, the overt religious allegory (yes, that's "Ave Maria" you hear in the blind shepherd's hut), to Karloff's painfully beautiful acting, John Mescall's gorgeous photography, the greatest creation sequence ever put on film and the worst first date in movie history.

EXPLORING THE

Chicago was the host recently of *The Official X-Files* convention held at the Congress Hotel on South Michigan Ave. While I usually avoid most conventions, I am an unabashed fan of the landmark science fiction program for many reasons. The camerawork is superb and motion picture like. The sound rivals any Hollywood feature film. The writing is an instant classic when it's good—better than any of the Star Trek spinoffs when it's bad. If I'm not home Friday night, the VCR is recording. If I'm at the Unknown Millionaires' museum, I watch it there. It's one of the only shows on television that I make sure to watch every week.

The X-Files chronicles the investigations of the fantastic by FBI agents Dana Scully and Fox Mulder. Usually battling government bureaucrats or exposing government secrets, the shows' main writer and creator, Chris Carter, is the Rod Serling of the nineties. The difference is that Rod often wrote of the world the way it could be. By plucking from the media reports of satanic ritual abuse, UFO sightings, alien autopsies and more, *The X-Files* grabs the sensational items in the world today and weaves them into stories. It's a conspiracy freaks' wet dream. For science fiction fans, it is manna from TV heaven.

I agreed to hook up with the Unknown Millionaire at the Hotel and went to the event early to scope the place out. The first thing I saw was the security-men dressed in drab suits with headphones, badges and sunglasses. It was pretty funny. After checking in, I scoped the main room/dealer room.

The attendees were white, the age range was early teens all the way to people in their 50's. There were Wicker Park kids standing next to suburban preppies. I'd say the audience was easily around 60% female. A TV monitor set up in the middle of the room was surrounded by people watching clips from the show.

There was a long line waiting to see the props, so I decided to wait for my friend to show, and went into the video screening room. The room was packed, and on the screen were all the ads for all the TV spots for the show. The stereo speakers were booming—in stereo this show knocks your socks off. It also made me wonder why bars don't have *X-Files* night and show the series. (The show sounds as good as it looks.) Before I knew it, an hour had passed. I was all caught up in the ads until my stomach started to growl. I decided to check out the Bergoff Cafe adjacent to the Hotel. It's a great stand up bar and sandwich spot (check it out if you are in the Loop between 11am and 3:30pm Monday through Saturday.

I went back to the hotel to meet the Unknown Millionaire and found him in the dealer room. The first thing he pointed out was that there really weren't a lot of dealers. *The X-Files* has nowhere near the amount of crap spun off of the show as *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* does. Basically, there were t-shirts and a chance to

tables dealt in science fiction magazines, posters and CDs. There was a table with jars of varying sizes containing space aliens! The Unknown Millionaire bought one, and we waited in line to see the prop room.

The prop and costume room was pretty dull. It confirmed the Unknown Millionaire's observation that props look real for a few seconds on television, but are fairly unconvincing when seen up close. We headed to the video room where the shows' co-producer, Paul Rabwin, was showing how the sound was done on the show. The Unknown Millionaire pointed out that about 20% of the women at the convention had their hair done like Agent Scully's, which was a wee bit scary.

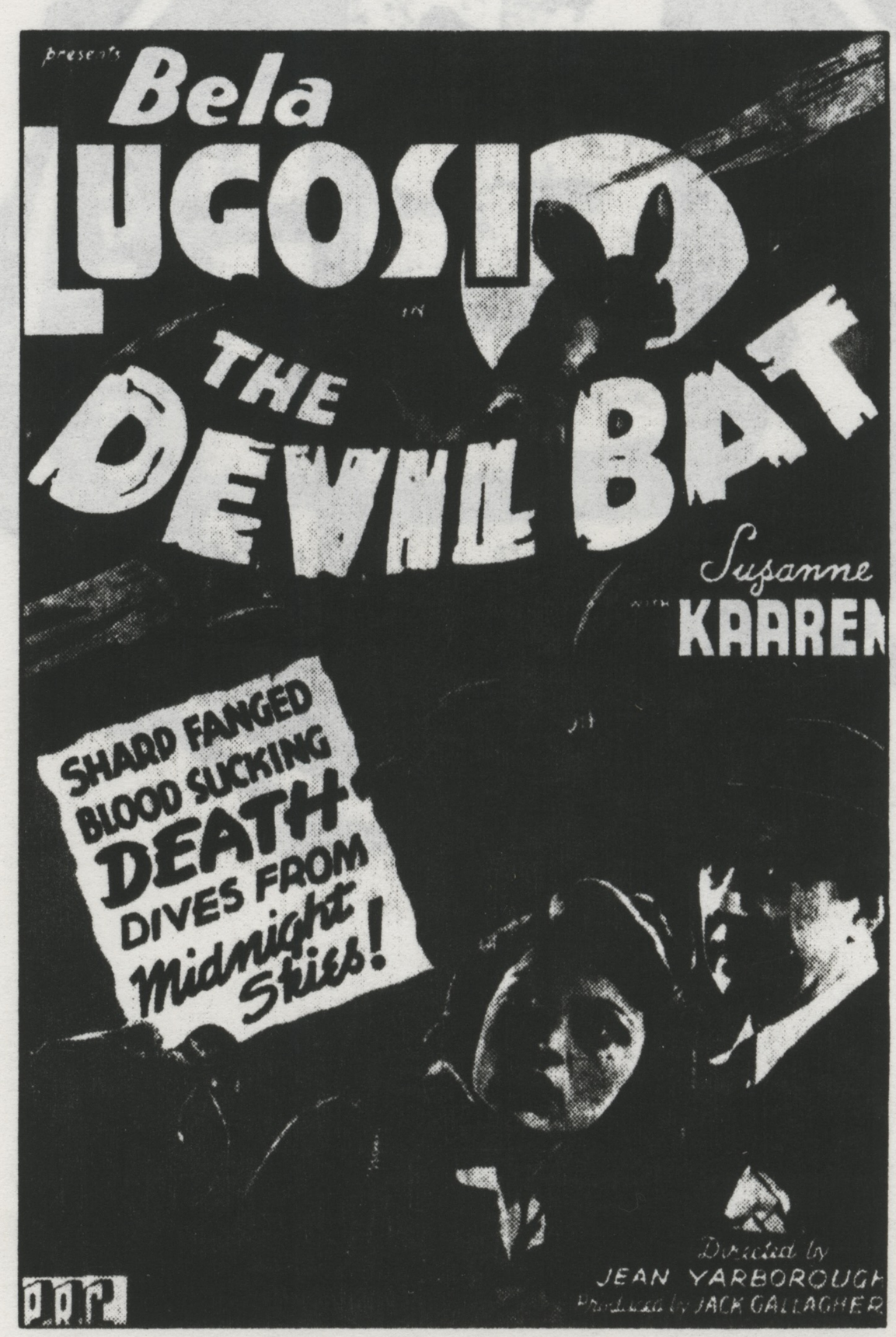
The big news was that *Neuromancer* author William Gibson (who punks) is working on a show.

One of the stranger questions, which luckily drew laughs from the crowd, concerned the alien autopsy footage and whether it was a CIA snuff film meant to throw UFO believers off the case. Most of the other questions were about the show.

Then came the blooper reel, which turned out to be the highlight of the day. It alone was worth the trip downtown. Dean Hagland, known as the Lone Gunman, was the guest. He did an improv comedy routine which was probably not improvised.

The Unknown Millionaire and I left and I had only one complaint: I couldn't get the theme music from the show out of my head for days.

Michael Flores



"We love film geeks"



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PSCHOTRONIC RUMBLINGS

HAPPY FIRST ANNIVERSARY! Two-hundred and forty pages in one year!! Whew! You hold in your hand issue 12 of the third incarnation of **IT'S ONLY A MOVIE.** These are amazing times for fans of horror, science fiction and action films. So many major films with huge budgets are coming down the pike, it's really hard to keep track. Science fiction is more popular today than during the **Star Wars** era. Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* is reputed to be budgeted at 75 million dollars!

Now, I don't know about you, but occasionally I am asked why **IOAM** reviews new films, big budget films and the like. I think people forget that *King Kong, The Bride of Frankenstein* and *Forbidden Planet* had large budgets and that there have been several periods in our past where films were embraced by masses only later to be regulated to formula and grindhouses. Low budget filmmaking today relies too much on nudity and gore to make up for the lack of a budget, then it goes direct to video. To read about those movies you can pick up **Draculina** or **Film Threat.** The producers are more willing to spend dough on actresses to show their breasts, but have forgotten that many low budget films of the past often had writers—people experienced at writing dialog and creating situations for low budgets. Even Ed Wood had experience writing plays and books! Most of the independent scare films fail for lack of a good writer. The video ghetto is actually, I believe, more responsible for killing low budget horror than the major studios.

Then you have the line blurred at what are experimental and what are independent films. One is anti-commercial, one is wanna be but anti-until-I-get-a-studio. At one point the studios were looking for the next *Hoop Dreams, Clerks* or *El Marachi.* Those films, however, were flukes. *Hoop Dreams* has yet to break even. *El Marachi* may have cost $7,000 to make, but it also cost the studio an additional $250,000 to reshoot footage before it was released!

I don't mind covering the new wave of psychotronic—and I encourage others to do so also. What I mean to say is that we all can't review the same 1950's films over and over. All the word psychotronic means is psycho and electronic—horror and science fiction. There are no time period constraints on the term.

Others have noticed that other writers here often do not agree with me about politics or film. I have no problem working with people who disagree with me. I wish I could say I've had the same fair shake when I deal with Democrats, but I haven't. I was once told to my face by a head of Second City that I could not go into any of the shows if I was going to do routines about Democrats and Republicans. Jokes about Republicans were encouraged, but jokes about Democrats would have to be checked first! It is supposed to be immoral for directors to start a blacklist and rumor campaign to

destroy writers or actors. But there are actors who do the same so-called McCarthy-like tactics—and other liberals don't notice any similarities with the campaign. They are only concerned if campaigns attack other liberals!

One of my interests is politics. It is interesting to see how an event can impact popular culture. (Anyone who goes back to study the Viet Nam War era will see its impact on creating a new popular culture, clothes, music, film, theatre, newspapers, etc.) This newsletter stated we were destined for Bosnia-months before we got there. Way back in issue 4 or 5, I wrote that America was close to being composed of 40% Asian and Hispanic background people and how that will change our views of music, culture and beauty. The Valentine's issue of **Interview** has as the beauty cover girl an Asian via Siberia. Several movies are coming out with Hispanic and Tex-Mex music. The only problem with that is the marketing—Hollywood hasn't figured out how to get Hispanics to see the films, and there are no Hispanic theatres that are A-category. The failure of *Desperado* was a failure of marketing.

The next major change is the immanent collapse of the Soviet Union. If Yeltsin cancels the upcoming election, democracy will lose. If Yeltsin holds the election, he will lose and the Communists return. There are now tens of thousands of Russian citizens in the United States. The Mob has linked up with the Soviet Mob, who are primarily members of the Communist Party. We are dealing with a power that has yet to admit as a nation that they are not a superpower.

You might say they are broke and couldn't cause the trouble they did. This is a popular misconception. The Soviet Union did not go broke when Gorbachov took over-it was broke long before. This did not mean the Soviets couldn't back terrorist acts or cruel wars. Already, terrorists who made peace are now breaking it off knowing that the world arena is about to change again.

The People's Republic of China is threatening to attack Taiwan. They want to test the U.S. and see how far they can go there...and in Hong Kong. They also want the U.S. out of that region. If we don't defend Taiwan, from Japan to Australia we will have everything from trade problems to a realignment of nations. We would have to respond quickly and without mercy if the Red Chinese launch an attack. Luckily, their navy sucks and is small.

Would a President who waited three years to attempt a move in Bosnia react quickly to Red China's conquest of that part of the globe?

Believe me, these events have the potential to change the rest of our lives and entertainments. That's before you even consider our government heading towards bankruptcy.

Hopefully, *It's Only a Movie* will continue to explore the past and the present. To look beyond the hype and give you a unique view of our popular culture, trash and flash. Happy Birthday!

Michael Flores

THE PSYCHOTRONIC FILM SHOW SCHEDULE

The Psychotronic Film Society will present the T.V. OR NOT T.V. FESTIVAL, featuring classic Psychotronic television at Delilah's, 2771 N. Lincoln. Call 312-509-4958 for more. All films and events are FREE!

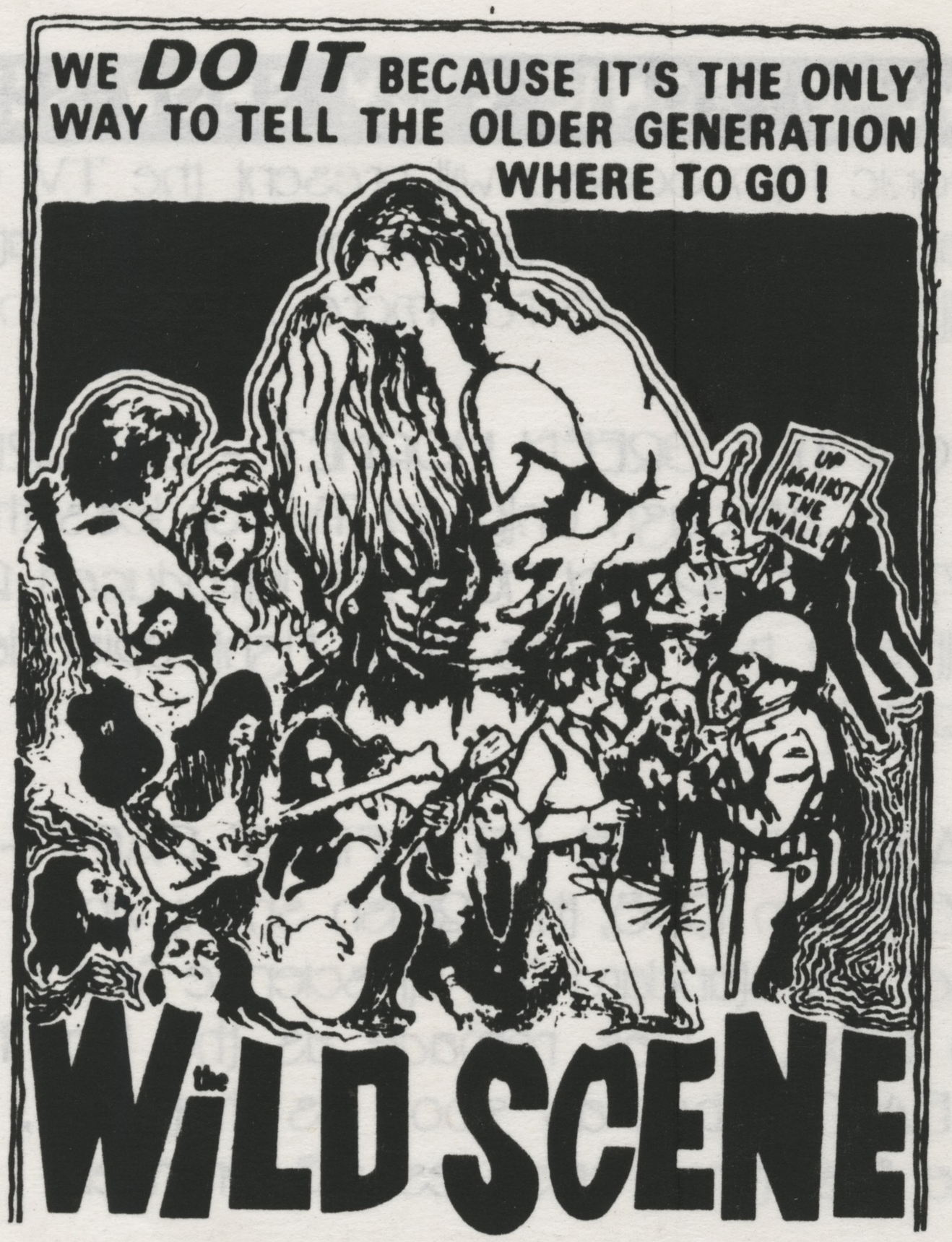
BRUCE LEE ON THE GREEN HORNET - SATURDAY FEBRUARY 24 - 6 pm. Although only on T.V. for less than one season (1966-67), *THE GREEN HORNET* introduced Bruce Lee to America. We'll see two of his best fight episodes! Britt Reid played the Hornet.

QUARTERMASS AND THE PIT - FIRST PART - SATURDAY MARCH 2 - 6 pm. In 1958, this British show, which never played in America, set the standard for all science fiction shows to be judged by. In 1968, it was remade as the film FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH, but, as good as that was, this is better. We'll show the first three episodes. U.S. premier!

QUARTERMASS AND THE PIT - SECOND PART - SATURDAY MARCH 9 - 6 pm. We'll show the final 3 parts of this excellent British series starring Andre Morell, Catherine Finn and Cec Linder. Never shown in America! As good as the *X-Files!*

THE AVENGERS AND HONEY WEST - SATURDAY MARCH 16 - 6 pm. Before Diana Rigg, Honor Blackman was the female lead on *The Avengers*. This was the second episode, The Death of a Great Dane. Patrick Mc Nee plays John Steed. Honor left the show to do *GOLDFINGER*. This episode was never shown in America!
Anne Francis starred in Honey West as the private detective who used science and fists to solve crimes in 1965.

DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE and THE IKE AND TINA TURNER SHOW - SATURDAY MARCH 23 - 6 pm. Gore Vidal adapted the Jekyll story for Climax! in 1955 starring Michael Rennie.with the original ads!
The Ike & Tina Turner Show was a 1971 pilot that never aired, but features the act at its prime.



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